

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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TRSE-00 /055 W

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7516

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OR 2 NEW DELHI 3608

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: GANDHI-NARAYAN POLITICAL DUEL:NEW NOTCHES

REF: NEW DELHI 3099

SUMMARY: INTENSIFIED POLITICAL MANEUVERING BETWEEN MRS. GANDHI AND J.P. NARAYAN INDICATES THAT L'AFFAIRE DHARIA (REFTEL) WAS ONLY THE FIRST ROUND OF A LONGER-RANGE POLITICAL DUEL MAINLY GEARED TO SOW MAXIMUM DISSENSION IN EACH OTHERS CAMPS. NARAYAN FOLLOWED UP HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE DHARIA GAME WITH A PUBLIC APPEAL TO CONGRESS KINGPINS CHAVAN AND RAM TO CHALLENGE MRS. GANDHI AND "SAH" THE

CONGRESS. THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE OTHER HAND CAN BE SATISFIED THAT HER FIRING OF DHARIA HAS LED TO A NEAR DISAPPEARANCE OF PUBLICLY EXPRESSED PRO-J.P. SENTIMENT BY CONGRESSMEN. SINCE DHARIA'S EXIT, SHE HAS MOVED SKILLFULLY TO MAINTAIN THE LEFT-RIGHT BALANCE IN CONGRESS BY SHIELDING HER
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DEPOSED MINISTER FROM EFFORTS TO TOSS HIM OUT OF CONGRESS

AND BY ALLOWING THE MORE ASSERTIVE ANTI-COMMUNIST WING OF THE PARTY, LED BY JAGJIVAN RAM, TO STEP UP ITS ATTACKS ON THE PRO-CPI LOBBY IN CONGRESS. SHE HAS SIMULTANEOUSLY TAKEN MEASURES TO UNDERCUT THE REGIONAL SUPPORT BASES OF PERHAPS POTENTIALLY THREATENING CONGRESS LEADERS CHAVAN AND H.F. BAHUGUNA. SHE IS ALSO CONTINUING EFFORTS TO DEFLATE NARAYAN'S REFORMIST APPEAL BY OFFERING TO DISCUSS THE REVISION OF ELECTORIAL LAWS WITH THE OPPOSITION AND TAKING THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS CHANGING THE INEFFECTIVE AND BELEAGUERED CONGRESS LEADERSHIP IN BIHAR. MRS. GANDHI, IN SHORT, IS BUSY PLAYING THE KIND OF TACTICAL POLITICS SHE HAS BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL AT IN THE PAST. END SUMMARY.

1. SINCE MOHAN DHARIA'S MARCH 3 DISMISSAL FROM THE CABINET (REFTEL), MRS. GANDHI AND J.P. HAVE STEPPED UP EFFORTS TO STROKE DISSENSION IN EACH OTHERS' CAMPS WHILE ATTEMPTING TO STRENGTHEN UNITY AMONG THEIR OWN FORCE. PM NARAYAN FOLLOWED UP HIS OBVIOUS PARTICIPATION IN DHARIA'S BRIEF BUT DRAMATIC MOMENT OF GLORY WITH A BLUNT, PUBLIC APPEAL TO CONGRESS KINGPINS (AGRICULTURAL MINISTER) JAGJIVAN RAM AND (EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER) Y.B. CHAVAN TO CHALLENGE MRS. GANDHI AND "SAVE" THE CONGRESS PARTY. EARLIER, ON MARCH 5, HE HAD ADDRESSED THE NEW DELHI ANNUL MEETING OF THE JANA SANGH, CALLING FOR CONFRONTATION WITH CONGRESS. DURING THE PAST WEEK, THE DMK IN TAMIL NADU AND CONGRESS-O POLITICIANS K. KAMARAJ (TAMIL NADU), SANJIVA REDDY (ANDHRA) AND P.C. SEN (WEST BENGAL) HAVE PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED THEIR SUPPORT FOR NARAYAN. ON MARCH 14, THE BULK OF THE SARVODAYA ORGANIZATION'S EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (21 OUT OF 24 MEMBERS), CONFORNTED WITH A CHOICE BETWEEN ABIDING BY VINOBE BHAVE'S NON-POLITICAL GROUND RULES OR FOLLOWING NARAYAN'S MOVEMENT, THOSE FOR NARAYAN BY RESIGNING FROM THE COUNCIL. THE EVENT IS BEING READ AS A FURTHER FORMALIZATION OF THE GROWING POLITICAL/ ELECTORAL - AS OPPOSED TO APOLITICAL/MORAL - CONTENT B NUPTAN'S OBJECTIVES. IT IS DOUBTFUL WHETHER THE ASSOCIATION OF ELDERLY POLITICIANS, FORMERLY DENUDED OF POWER BY MRS. GANDHI, WITH THE MOVEMENT, THE DMK OR THE GROUP OF POLITICALLY

INEXPERIENCED SARVODAYA LEADERS WILL SIGNIFICANTLY EFFECT THEIR OWN OR NARAYAN'S STRENGTH.

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2. MRS. GANDHI IS MOVING WITH CHARACTERISTIC SKILL IN PARRYING NARAYAN'S ATTEMPTS TO EXACERBATE THE NUMEROUS DIVISIONS WITHIN HER MULTI-FACETED PARTY, WHILE (AS MENTIONED REFTEL) MOVING TO DEFLATE HIS REFORMIST APPEALS. SINCE THE FEBRUARY DISMUPSAL OF MAHARASHTRA'S CHIEF MINISTER NAIK AND HER MARCH 3 FIRING OF DHARIA, PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY BY CONGRESSMEN FOR NARAYAN HAVE ALMOST DISAPPEARED.

MOST CONGRESSMEN AND, FROM ALL APPEARANCE, THE CONGRESS LEADERSHIP, ARE KEEPING THE PRO-J.P. CHANDERSHAKER-KANT-

DHARIA TRIO AT ARMS LENGTH, THOUGH THE THREE ARE CONTINUING THEIR PRIVATE LOBBYING EFFORTS WITHIN CONGRESS CIRCLES. PERHAPS INDICATIVE OF MRS. GANDHI'S DISPLEASURE TOWARDS DHARIA'S

EARLIER OUT-SPOKENNESS, PARTY LEADERS IN THE UPPER HOUSE (RAJYA SABHA) REJECTED KANT'S ATTEMPT TO JOIN IN THE MARCH 10 DEBATE ON THE U.S. ARMS EMBARGO AFTER THE LATTER HAD STOOD UP AND ACTUALLY REQUESTED THE FLOOR. THOROUGHLY ANNOYED AND EMBARRASSED, KANT WALKED OUT, PREPARED SPEECH IN HAND.

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R 141432Z MAR 75 ZDK
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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 NEW DELHI 3608

3. THE REMOVAL OF THE ANTI-COMMUNIST DHARIA FROM THE CABINET HAS SILENCED THE VOCAL ANTI-DHARIA PRO-CPI LOBBY IN CONGRESS WHICH HAD BEEN DEMANDING HIS DISMISSAL. PROBABLY WITH A VIEW TO JUGGLING THE PRO AND ANTI-CPI FACTIONS WITHIN CONGRESS BACK INTO PLACE, MRS. GANDHI HAS SO FAR RESISTED INITIATIVES TO DRIVE DHARIA COMPLETELY OUT OF

THE PARTY. SHE HAS ALSO NOT MOVED TO STILL A SHARP UPSWING IN ANTI-COMMUNIST CRITICISM BY THE PARTY'S RIGHT WING, WHICH HAS BEEN LED BY HER LONG TIME POLITICAL ALLY JAGJIVAN RAM. HER DEPUTY LEADER IN THE CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, V.B. RAJU, HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO LOBBY CONGRESS MPS TO SOFT PEDDLE THEIR ATTACKS ON THE U.S. ARMS SUPPLY POLICY ON THE GROUNDS SUCH ATTACKS WILL EMBOLDEN AND STRENGTHEN THE PRO-CPI ELEMENTS IN CONGRESS.

4. THE PRIME MINISTER'S DECISION TO REPLACE NAIK WITH REGIONAL MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS LEADERS S.B. CHAVAN HAS STRENGTHENED HER OWN DIRECT INFLUENCE IN WESTERN INDIA'S MOST IMPORTANT CONGRESS STRONGHOLD AT THE EXPENSE OF
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FORMER MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER AND CURRENT EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER Y.B. CHAVAN. THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER HAS SINCE BEEN GOING OUT OF HIS WAY (PARTICULARLY SINCE NARAYAN'S PUBLIC APPEAL TO "SAVE" CONGRESS) TO ESPOUSE HIS TOTAL SUPPORT FOR MRS. GANDHI. LAST WEEK THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO MOVED TO UNDERCUT U.P.'S CONGRESS CHIEF MINISTER BAHUGUNA'S YEAR-LONG, GRADUAL CONSOLIDATION OF POLITICAL POWER IN THE CONGRESS PARTY'S AND MRS. GANDHI'S MOST IMPORTANT STATE. AT THE BEHEST OF NEW DELHI, BAHUGUNA HAS JUST TURNED THE U.P. CONGRESS PARTY ORGANIZATION OVER TO HIS FACTIONAL COMPETITORS (UNION MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS K. TRIPATHI AND PRO-CPI UNION MINISTER OF STEEL CHANDERJIT YADEV). HE HAS ALSO BEEN MADE TO INCORPORATE AT LEAST FOUR OF THEIR REPRESENTATIVES IN A MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE.

5. WHILE STRENGTHENING INTRA-CONGRESS UNITY AND INSURING HER PERSONAL POSITION PRIOR TO THE ELECTIONS, MRS. GANDHI HAS ALSO BEEN MOVING ASTUTELY TO DEFLATE THE REFORMIST PLATFORM OF NARAYAN'S MOVEMENT WHILE LEAVING THE LINES OPEN FOR A DIALOGUE WITH "J.P.," SHOULD HE CHOOSE TO ABANDON HIS OPPORTUNISTIC ALLIES FOR A COMPROMISE. SHE RECENTLY CALLED ON THE OPPOSITION TO JOIN CONGRESS IN REVISING INDIA'S ELECTORAL LAWS, WHICH IS ONE OF NARAYAN'S CHIEF OBJECTIVES. (THE JANA SANGH, NARAYAN'S MOST SIGNIFICANT ORGANIZATIONAL ALLY, IMMEDIATELY REFUSED.) IN AN APPARENT FURTHER GESTURE IN NARAYAN'S DIRECTION, THE CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY PARTY ON MARCH 11 ANNOUNCED THAT BIHAR'S BELEAGUERED CHIEF MINISTER GHAFOR WOULD BE ALLOWED TO STEP DOWN AFTER TWO WEEKS. THE ANNOUNCEMENT IS BEING READ IN SOME QUARTERS AS AN INDIRECT ATTEMPT TO RESURRECT THE GANDHI-NARAYAN DIALOGUE WHICH HAD BARELY BEGUN BEFORE IT ENDED IN DISAGREEMENT LAST NOVEMBER 1. GHAFOR'S RESIGNATION, LIKE ELECTORAL REFORMS, IS A PRINCIPAL NARAYAN DEMAND. WHETHER NARAYAN WILL ACCEPT THIS SOP WITHOUT ALSO REQUIRING THE DISSOLUTION OF THE BIHAR ASSEMBLY REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT

IS UNLIKELY.

6. EVEN IF MRS. GANDHI HOLDS OUT HOPE FOR A RECONCILIATION WITH NARAYAN, SHE IS SURELY NOT BANKING ON IT. BUT ANYTHING THAT SOWS UNCERTAINTY, INDECISION OR CONFUSION IN J.P.'S CAMP SERVES CONGRESS (OR HER) INTERESTS. INDEED, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE OPPOSITION SEEMS SOMEWHAT DISCOURAGED ALREADY. JANA SANGH LEADER A.B. VAJPAYEE RECENTLY TOLD AN EMBASSY SOURCE THAT HE THOUGHT THERE WAS NO CHANCE MRS. GANDHI COULD BE DEFEATED IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS.

7. THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S RECENT MANEUVERING UNDERSCORES VAJPAYEE'S CONCERN. INDIA'S FOREMOST POLITICIAN IS CLEARLY MOVING TO RECLAIM THE INITIATIVE SHE LOST TO NARAYAN LAST YEAR. SAXBE

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